

July 11, 2003

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons
Elementary, Middle and Secondary School Principals

FROM: William L. Librera, Ed.D.
Commissioner

SUBJECT: The New Jersey Model for Identifying Highly Qualified Teachers

As you are aware, the Department of Education is preparing an overall plan to assist districts in complying with the Highly Qualified Teacher Requirement of The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. In August, the department will release The New Jersey Model for Identifying Highly Qualified Teachers, a packet of general information, forms and instructions to support districts in complying with the highly qualified teacher provision. As mentioned in my previous memo about this topic on May 9, 2003, teachers can meet the definition of the highly qualified teacher through federal specifications or through a High Objective Uniform Standard of Evaluation developed by the state. This alternate means is the *New Jersey HOUSE Standard: The Content Knowledge Matrix* which will be part of the packet of information distributed to all school districts. This matrix provides a variety of means through which teachers can demonstrate content knowledge competence.

In addition, the department will be providing technical assistance and training sessions in August for district administrators on this topic. There is currently general information about the NCLB legislation on the DOE website at www.doe.state.nj.us/education. In August, the department will also provide specific information regarding the highly qualified teacher provisions, a downloadable PowerPoint on the highly qualified teacher issue for district use, frequently asked questions and the packet of forms entitled The New Jersey Model for Identifying Highly Qualified Teachers. It will be important for district administrators to provide information sessions to assist teachers in determining their current status in meeting the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher.

Providing Security for Veteran Teachers and New Hires

It is vital that district administrators and teachers understand that there are to be no consequences to individual teachers in terms of job loss, if teachers do not currently satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher. This is particularly true for veteran teachers

in schools and programs supported with Title I funds. While districts must make every effort to ensure that new and newly hired teachers in schools and programs supported with Title I funds are highly qualified at the time of hiring, veteran teachers have until the end of the 2005-2006 year to satisfy the requirement. The state has a responsibility under the federal law to support and monitor district progress toward meeting the goal of increasing the number of highly qualified teachers. Districts have the ongoing responsibility to support and monitor teacher progress toward meeting the goal of satisfying the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher by or before the end of the 2005-2006 school year. Districts should take no action to remove teachers who do not yet satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher.

Special Considerations: Middle School Teachers

One of the challenges New Jersey faces is that the appropriate tests of content knowledge at the middle grades level are not yet available for New Jersey middle school teachers working in departmentalized middle schools. We expect the appropriate middle school content tests to be ready early in 2004, and the department is working now on the standard-setting required to make these tests available as quickly as possible. Districts that do not receive Title I funding, and schools where Title I funding is limited to targeted assistance programs, should not be dissuaded from hiring otherwise qualified middle school teachers who need to take these tests in order to demonstrate their content expertise for the teaching assignment(s) they will have. The proposed revisions in the licensing code will ensure that future teachers already satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher when they are licensed, and those in the pipeline may be hired because they satisfy the licensing regulations currently in place.

Special Considerations: Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers who provide direct instruction in one or more core academic subjects in departmentalized middle and secondary settings must satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher in accordance with the grade level of the content/curriculum they are teaching rather than the chronological age of the students they teach. Special education teachers who provide direct instruction in elementary (K-5) settings as well as those providing instruction in self-contained classes in the middle grades (6-8) must satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher at the elementary level.

The requirements for special education teachers who provide in-class or pull-out support services or who team teach with a content area instructor in general education settings are not yet final. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is currently being reauthorized and the Senate bill requires all of these support/team teachers to satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher at the elementary content level. The department is waiting for the final IDEA legislation to determine the exact requirements for special education teachers who only provide consultative/support services and/or who team teach with a general education teacher but who are not the sole providers of direct content instruction. As we receive further information regarding requirements for special education teachers, we will provide additional guidance to the field.

Special Considerations: ESL Teachers

ESL teachers who provide direct content instruction in reading, English or language arts must satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher in accordance with the level of the curriculum they are teaching. ESL teachers who co-teach with a content area instructor and/or who provide supplemental services such as in-class or pull-out support but who are not the sole providers of direct content instruction are not required to satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher.

Title I Parental Notification Requirements

The federal legislation requires that schools and programs funded under Title I inform parents of their right to inquire about the qualifications of the teachers in the school. The packet you will soon receive includes a sample letter you may use to inform parents about their rights of inquiry. This letter should go out at the beginning of the school year to parents of all students in school-wide Title I funded programs and to the parents of all students in targeted assistance programs funded by Title I. Please note that the letter does not need to go to the all parents in a school where there is a targeted Title I.

The federal legislation also requires that Title I-funded schools and programs notify parents when their child has been taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who has not yet satisfied the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher. The packet you will soon receive also includes a sample letter you may use to inform parents about their child's teacher's status as not yet highly qualified. We recommend sending this letter no earlier than mid-November once teachers have had the opportunity to identify whether they satisfy the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher through federal specifications or through New Jersey's HOUSE Standard.

New Jersey's HOUSE Standard

The New Jersey HOUSE Standard offers veteran teachers in Title I schools and programs and all teachers in non-Title I schools an alternate means of demonstrating that they are highly qualified to teach core academic subjects. The New Jersey HOUSE Standard will allow teachers to accrue 10 points across five categories that include college coursework, professional development activities, team teaching with a content specialist, national board certification for elementary generalists and years of successful teaching experience. Elementary teachers who can document 10 points on a content knowledge matrix will satisfy the definition of a highly qualified teacher. Middle and high school teachers will need to accumulate 10 points on a content knowledge matrix for each content area taught. Teachers who nearly have 10 points will have until the end of the 2005-2006 school year to accrue the rest of the needed points through activities outlined on the HOUSE Standard. Teachers who have less than half the number of points needed under the HOUSE Standard may want to consider taking the appropriate Praxis II exam(s) for the content area(s) and level(s) they teach. Again, all veteran teachers have until the end of the 2005-2006 school year to satisfy the definition of a highly qualified teacher.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that although teachers will complete the initial highly qualified teacher identification information this fall, full implementation of NCLB is not required until the end of the 2005-2006 school year. It is the department's mission to support districts and teachers in meeting this requirement. I would like to reiterate that it is vital that districts not terminate teachers now on the basis of not yet having satisfied the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher. Further, non-Title I districts should not hesitate to hire new staff who meet the current requirements under the current licensing regulations even if they do not yet meet the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher.

For further information, or any questions about the department's work in this important area, please contact Jay Doolan, director, Office of Academic and Professional Standards at (609) 984-5322. Additional information can also be found on the department's No Child Left Behind website at www.nj.gov/njded/grants/nclb.

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